

JAN 14 1950

QUARTERLY BULLETIN OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN LIBRARY

VOLUME FOUR

NUMBER TWO

DECEMBER 1949

Adventures in Africana

by D. H. Varley, M.A., F.L.A.

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Adventures in Africana



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Adventures in Africana

by D. H. Varley, M.A., F.L.A.

Secretary and Librarian, South African Library

Jointly published by the

University of Cape Town

and the

Trustees of the South African Library

Cape Town, 1949

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Foreword

Just when the term "Africana" was first used in the sense defined in the opening paragraph of this book is probably now a matter of conjecture; but there is no doubt that during the last quarter of a century its use has become so widespread as to have made it a household word throughout the homes of the reading public of South Africa. Collectors of Africana are to be found in every village and, indeed, in almost every street in our towns and cities; but, unfortunately, there has grown up around this collecting an element of commercialism which, when coupled with the possessive or hoarding instinct, renders valueless the majority of the smaller collections since their contribution to the story of the past is never told.

The full historical and educational value of these collections of mementoes from the past is, however, appreciated by only a few. It is fitting, therefore, that those who have access to and expert knowledge of some of our greatest collections of Africana should at intervals share with the public the interest to be derived from a study of their treasures. Amongst those so favoured are the librarians of our main libraries and Mr. Varley is thus obviously one whose wide and expert knowledge of the written and printed records of our past should rightly be made available to as wide a circle as possible. It is for this reason that the University of Cape Town, through its Board of Extra-mural Studies, asked Mr. Varley to deliver a short course of lectures on this topic.

In the choice of a title for his three lectures, Mr. Varley happily combined the appeal already attaching to the word "Africana" with that delightful sense of the unexpected and unexplored which goes with the word "adventure." That the promise thus embodied in the title of his talks was no idle one is amply borne out in the pages of this little book.

The lectures were delivered under the aegis of the University and attracted a representative and enthusiastic audience on each occasion. Many, however, of those who wished to listen to Mr. Varley were prevented from attending all the lectures and many others were unable, for obvious reasons, to attend any of them. The proposal that the lectures should be published in booklet form therefore met with enthusiastic support from all concerned.

Insofar as I am able to encourage others to read this book I do so in the full confidence that those who start the book will be unable to put it

down until they have finished it. The windows which Mr. Varley opens into the social history of South Africa reveal vistas of fascinating interest. It is his hope and ours that this volume will encourage all its readers to seek fresh fields for further adventures in Africana.

November, 1949.

THOS. B. DAVIE

Principal & Vice-Chancellor, University of Cape Town.



WOOD-ENGRAVING OF VAN RIEBEECK

by Alex. Reid

from *Nederduitsch Zuid-Afrikaansch Tydschrift*, Deel VI, 1829.

ADVENTURES IN AFRICANA

'The thing I want to see is not Red-book lists and Court Calendars and Parliamentary Registers, but the life of Man . . . what men did, thought and suffered . . . How men lived and had their being; were it but economically, as, what wages they got and what they bought with these? History, as it stands all bound up in gilt volumes, is but a shade more instructive than the wooden volumes of a backgammon board.'

—Thomas Carlyle

History as Adventure

WHEN WE SPEAK OF AFRICANA we mean to imply all those objects large and small, natural and man-made, that relate to the history of Africa and of Southern Africa in particular, from Table Mountain—shall we say—to a piece of old Cape furniture, a Cape pamphlet or a Bowler print. More specifically, we think of Africana in terms of human settlement in the sub-Continent—but always in terms of history and the living past.

The theme of these lectures is two-fold. Firstly, to show that the real stuff of history is not made up of wars, political conflicts and group animosities, but of the lives of men and women; that their way of life can only be reconstructed through material relics—the records they have left behind, which are in fact these self-same items of *Africana*; and that the retracing of history and more particularly what is known as social history, is an adventure that can be shared by anyone who has the interest, inclination and time to pursue it for himself. Secondly, these lectures are intended to show how the social history of South Africa can be re-lived by approaching it from one particular aspect: the development of books and reading through the first two centuries of European settlement at the Cape.

Before embarking on the first adventure, however, it is perhaps worthwhile exploring the nature of South African history itself, as seen by the man or woman with no special historical training, and only the most general and passing interest in the subject. For many such people the only kind of history they enjoy is probably 'history' used in the Shakespearean sense: something with a distinctive plot, sharply-defined characters, swift action, a recognisable beginning and a definite end. 'Real' history, as taught in schools and colleges, is not like this at all; through wrong emphasis, the

straight-jacket requirements of the examination syllabus and the sheer impossibility of expounding complicated causes and effects, history becomes too often just another subject—a memory test, a farrago of names, a grotesque reflection of the past with precious little relation to the present and none at all to the future.

This popular conception of history has been aptly illustrated recently by the singer of a well-known ditty called 'The day I read a book'. He was sad because 'it was such a shame' he 'couldn't remember the name of it'. But 'it wasn't a history, I know, because it had no plot: it wasn't a mystery, because nobody there got shot'. But just as there is a kind of history that hasn't always got a plot, and a kind of mystery in which people don't always get shot, so there may be a kind of history-mystery, or mystery-history, that holds more truth for the ordinary man, and more chance of being understood, than all the battles, treaties and constitutional niceties of the text-book. This is the kind of history we are concerned with here and now.

IN THE WRITING, teaching and understanding of history in all countries of the world there have been four well-defined stages, and South African history shows no exception to the rule. These stages are, successively: history as *legend*; as *chronology*; as *broad-sweeping narrative*; and as *revaluation*, in which the broad-sweeping narrative is re-examined, split up into special studies and put together again rather in the manner of a science than an art, though with characteristics of both.

In communities that have no writing or printing, history begins and survives as *legend*; once it is written down, it becomes (very often, but not always), literature. Such legend is based partly on actual events, but largely on the collective memory of generations of listeners and talkers, through whom the original story is embellished and perhaps lost sight of altogether. Among our Bantu races, with no written tradition, history has clearly been obliged to take this form. It is not only among the Bantu, however, that history was, as somebody has put it, 'his story'; for in the absence of any printing press at the Cape from 1652 until 1784—the period I have described elsewhere as the Age of Whispers—the Europeans themselves had no means of setting down their remembrance of things past other than the official Diary kept by the Governor, and their own stories, verbally communicated from father to son.

We have, therefore, during this Age of Whispers, a wealth of legends which are partly based on fact, partly works of imagination. One of the earliest and best known is the legend of the *Flying Dutchman*, immortalised in literature and music, and recurring even in our own time. It is not strange

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that there should persist at the Cape, that most famous tavern of the seas, such a legend of storm and malediction which even in this sophisticated atom age loses little of its point and savour.

A second legend peculiar to the Cape is the old story of Van Hunks and his smoking match on Table Mountain with the Devil—a story which is often asked for and yet is difficult to find. Ian Colvin, in his book *South Africa*¹—now, unfortunately, out of print, re-tells in his charming and romantic style the story of how Table Mountain got its cloud, a tale attributed to the Malays who 'have been to Mecca, and know all about Mohamed's coffin which hangs in the air, and the voyages of Sinbad the sailor'. You must read for yourselves how the old pirate and the stranger in black velvet puffed and puffed until a great cloud arose; 'the burghers coughed and choked and drank brandy within closed doors, and said never had there been such a south-easter'. When the stranger was finally vanquished, and revealed himself, 'there was a tremendous crash of thunder, as if the mountain had been split in two', 'a blaze of lightning and a dreadful smell of sulphur', and when the mist rolled away there was no stranger and no van Hunks—nothing, in fact, except an attractive legend which is still told, and perhaps believed, in the Cape Town of today.

This tale of fire and fury puts me in mind of a lesser-known legend, one of the inimitable adventures of the famous Baron von Munchausen. He describes his travels in a wonderful airborne carriage drawn by nine winged bulls and recounts how, in search of new coach-springs, he decided to make his way to the Cape of Good Hope, where he supposed he would get some Dutch smiths and carpenters. After skimming over the waters of the Red Sea and through the pass of Babelmandeb to the great Western Coast of Africa (where Alexander the Great had not the courage to venture),

'I drove on with amazing rapidity; and thinking to halt on shore at the Cape, I unfortunately drove too close, and shattered the right side wheels of my vehicle against the rock, now called the Table Mountain. The machine went against it with such impetuosity, as completely shattered the rock in a horizontal direction; so that the summit of the mountain, in the form of a semi-sphere, was knocked into the sea; and the steep mountain becoming thereby flattened at the top, has since received the name of the Table Mountain, from its similarity to that piece of furniture'.²

He goes on to describe how this revealed that tremendous sprite, the ghost of the Cape 'which cuts such a figure in the *Lusiad* (of Camoens) which, on hearing the dreadful rattle of the wheels, was thunderstruck, and instantly giving a shriek, sunk down ten thousand fathoms into the earth, while the mountain, vomiting out some smoke, silently closed up, and left not a trace behind!' This story can hardly be passed off as history in any sense at all, but it is good fun, and ought to take its place among the man-made legends of the Cape.

The last tale in this category to which I am going to refer is one based on facts that we have been able to verify; yet because it was told and re-told, with exaggerations and embellishments, it still took on the characteristics of a legend. This is the story of Governor van Noodt, a 'devil incarnate', who after condemning four malefactors to death and ensuring their execution, was found dead in his chair immediately after, struck down by an avenging spirit.

'To meet the dead his spirit fled,
While sitting in the hall.'³

The events on which this story are based actually took place in 1729, and the tale is told with great verve and detail by one of the most interesting of our witnesses of eighteenth-century Cape history, O. F. Mentzel, in his *Life of R. S. Allemann*, published many years after he left the Cape, and re-published by the Van Riebeeck Society in 1919⁴. Mentzel himself did not reach the Cape until three or four years after the events he describes, and his account is therefore based entirely on hearsay and gossip. Yet it stands up remarkably well to criticism based on our knowledge of archival sources, and is a good example of a legend that is still a record of ascertainable historical fact.

FROM HISTORY AS LEGEND we pass to history as *chronology*. In Europe such history is exemplified in the old monastic records, which preserved through the dark ages at least the bare tale of events. In South Africa such an outline history was no doubt kept in the official records, but for lack of a printing press we have no other evidence than the material to be quarried for in the public archives. There must, however, have been a powerful reservoir of knowledge and opinion about the past among the people of the Cape, for when the *free* press was finally established, in 1824, its first products abound in extracts from Van Riebeeck's diary, descriptions of exploration, and topographical and scientific descriptions of the Cape which seemed to be already well planted in men's minds. There is an interesting book in the South African Library—called *De Geskiedenis van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*⁵, which is actually the first history book to be printed at the Cape. It was compiled by that extraordinary person Suasso de Lima—printer, publisher, town wit and official versifier and much besides. This is not a rhymed history, but a straightforward chronology of events in this year and that, arranged in the form of a catechism. It begins (in Dutch) as follows:

- Q. What do people mean, in general, by history?
- A. A believable story of important events.
- Q. What particular kind of history interests you most?
- A. The history of the land where I was born.

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Q. And where were you born?

A. At the Cape of Good Hope.

This was the first time that anyone in South Africa could express in print his pride in the fact that he was born at the Cape, and that Cape history was his own history. As for the authenticity of the events set out by Suasso de Lima, we must study them with a pinch of salt, for they were arranged with an eye to pleasing the presiding Governor.

Later in the nineteenth century we come across the well-known *Metrical Outline* of George Leith⁶, which many people of middle-age still remember as the staple food of their own history lessons at school in the Cape. It resembles somewhat the filmstrip of today—a mnemonic aid in place of a visual aid—and starts off, as you may remember,

'In 14 hundred 86
September of that year
Brave Diaz passed the Cape and strove
Towards India to steer'.

And so on for many verses. There is one I cannot forbear from quoting:

'With honour Goske left the Cape,
In '76 came Bax,
Whose peace of mind was sorely tried
By Hottentot attacks',

which reaches almost Belloc-ian heights. This is hardly history in the proper sense of the word, but it did serve to fix the chronological framework of the most important historical events of the country for many people, who otherwise would never have heard either of Bax or of Goske—to their loss.

THE NEXT TYPE of historical development we come across I have described as *broad-sweeping narrative*, usually written by a chronicler who sees in a mass of detail some predominating thread, and who often transforms unpromising dross into something akin to great literature. Names that readily come to mind include Gibbon, Macaulay, Carlyle and Ranke. To these men, surveying great areas of recorded actions and events, one looks for long views and penetrating insight rather than the painstaking reconstruction of carefully authenticated facts. For this reason one is ready to make allowance for certain weaknesses of which they themselves are often well aware—faults of perspective and even occasionally of judgment—which nevertheless do not detract substantially from the greatness of their work.

In South Africa the task of writing this kind of broad-sweeping narrative devolved almost accidentally upon a Canadian journalist of prodigious energy but no training in historical method—George McCall Theal, whose

many volumes are a monument to his industry and devotion. Theal was able to consult records both in South Africa and overseas which were still virgin territory, and in some respects—notably the reconstruction of the history of the native tribes of South Africa—a subject near to his heart—his work has stood the test of time. In other directions, however, Theal was handicapped by two factors: his own diligence which perhaps took him too superficially over too wide a field; and his lack of anything resembling a literary style, without which the most faithful historian's labours lack sparkle and conviction.

There is, however, yet another pitfall for the all-seeing, broad-sweeping historian. By the nature of his trade, he must constantly exercise judgments, and in making his judgments he is bound to show bias, struggle against it though he may. This bias is often unconscious—but it should nevertheless be allowed for by the historian himself. Theal, on the contrary, in the evening of his endeavours, allowed himself to say:

'To the utmost of human ability I have striven to write without fear, favour and prejudice . . . I confidently place my work before the public—as a true and absolutely unbiassed narrative'.⁷

Alas for Theal! Historians following in his tracks and re-examining his documents have only too often come to entirely different conclusions. Moreover, they have not infrequently had cause to complain that—whether wilfully or not—Theal has omitted evidence which would have spoilt the line of argument on which he was at that time working. A good example of this is mentioned in a letter by the late John Gaspard Gubbins—that prince of Africana collectors—who lived in the corner of Transvaal known as 'the Keate award', and had read every document on the locality that he could lay hands on. Speaking of the official publication dealing with this segment of history (popularly known as 'the Bloemhof bluebook') Gubbins says that 'Dr. Theal seems to have used this blue-book according to his own lights. He quotes apparently damning statements and omits to quote the simple and obvious explanations given in subsequent evidence'⁸—and goes on to give chapter and verse. Similarly, Professor J. S. Marais, in his study of H. C. D. Maynier⁹, has much to say in the same vein of Theal's misuse of sources. To say this is not to detract from the value of his work as a whole, which is and must remain for many years the starting-point from which South African history must be revalued.

FOR THIS PROCESS of *revaluation* is the latest stage in the study of history, though far from being the final one. In English history it has taken the form

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of specialisation, in which scholars have worked on the institutional and constitutional aspects in great detail, or on the history of art or science or economics of each age. The process of putting together again has been brilliantly carried out by a number of contemporary writers, yet as they have worked the whole basis of historical thought has been shifting. I have quoted as a motto to these lectures some words written by Carlyle a century ago, in which he stressed that it was 'what men did, thought and suffered' that should be occupying the attentions of the historians, 'how they lived and had their being'. He was the precursor of thinkers like Lord Acton, who remarked that 'the great historian now takes his meals to the kitchen'; in other words, concerns himself with the daily life of the people, and their conditions of living. The same thought was put in yet another way by the jurist F. W. Maitland, who always maintained that the essential matter of history was not what happened, *but what people thought and said about it*.¹⁰

This is a new view of history, and it has revolutionised the writing and shaping of history in many parts of the world. So far as South Africa is concerned, this brand of history has been singularly neglected in the past, and it may perhaps be said that we have only now reached the stage of revaluation. In saying this, one must not undervalue the work of historical re-integration done, for instance, by Professor Eric Walker¹¹ and Dr. de Kiewiet,¹² to mention only two examples. We have also had some excellent studies of specific institutions (such as Dr. Boësen's studies of the Dutch Commissaries of the eighteenth century,¹³ and Dr. Venter's of the workings of local government¹⁴); some notable studies in individual and collective biography (such as Professor Thom's life of Maritz,¹⁵ and Dr. P. J. van der Merwe's original and stimulating researches into the life and customs of the Trekker communities¹⁶); and, in English, the scholarly and yet most readable studies of early Natal life by Professor Alan Hattersley.¹⁷ Nevertheless it must be admitted that the writing of history in South Africa has to some extent been hampered by the predominance of the academic thesis, in which the student, often immature in judgment, is tempted to suit his evidence to a preconceived conclusion—a practice which makes mockery of objective historical study and is, in fact, merely history written backwards.

In the writing and study of the new history we go for evidence not so much to the blue-books, where officials write to please authority, but to letters and diaries of private individuals, a rich store of information which has so far scarcely been tapped. More attention is paid to building and architecture, cookery and costume, folk-art and literature, and similar aspects of daily living common to prince and peasant and of equivalent value in determining their deeds and thoughts. And this type of history, fortunately, is one that most people like and understand, and one that seems most directly to touch their own lives through their own fathers and grandfathers

and the material evidences—the Africana—they have left behind.

Social history, as the many readers of Professor Trevelyan's *Social History of England* can readily testify, is everybody's business. There is at the moment a remarkable uprush of interest in books, pictures, buildings and furniture relating to the history of this country—interest which is likely to increase notably as time goes on. But to satisfy this interest, there is all too little published material available, as anyone knows who has tried to seek out—for example—authentic information about costumes at the Cape, or the toys and games South African children used to play with, or a hundred other familiar aspects of daily life. Who is going to provide this information, and how soon? And are we obliged to wait on the efforts of the academic historians?

There is this encouraging fact for those who, like myself, believe that much of the spadework for the writing of our social history can be done by the interested amateurs: practically all the writers on this subject have themselves been amateurs, in the sense that they have had no formal historical training. Mrs. Alys Trotter, who wrote on old Cape Colony and its houses; Dorothea Fairbridge, author of two of the best books on Cape architecture ever written; P. W. Laidler, a medical officer of health by profession, and a prolific writer on Cape history, the Cape theatre and the press; Professor G. E. Pearse, leading authority on Cape furniture—but a professor of architecture, not of history; Dr. E. E. Mossop, the historian of the old Cape Roads—a retired medical man—none of them have been professional historians. Ian Colvin, like Theal, was a journalist; Sir George Cory was a chemist; Leibbrandt, who did so much pioneer work in the Cape archives, was a minister of religion; J. G. Gubbins, whom I have just quoted, was a mining engineer. Sidney Mendelssohn himself, the first great collector of Africana, compiler of the classic *South African bibliography*, was perhaps the perfect amateur. So there is hope for us all.

WHAT, THEN, ARE THE *materials* that we should have to use, and how should we go about using them? The chief *kinds* of material can be briefly described: for an illustration of method, we must follow out our two historical adventures in the lectures that follow.

First let me say that we are not concerned here with any Africana material other than what is written or *printed*. Buildings, furniture, silverware, paintings and costumes, are all of absorbing interest, but they must be studied on the spot if they are buildings, or else in museums, galleries, or private homes. So far as *archival material* is concerned, it must be admitted that few laymen are well enough equipped to pick their way through the mass of documents of ten written in difficult hands, with which our public archives

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are enriched. Nevertheless there is undoubtedly scope even in the Archives for those with a modicum of training and a feel for history, although the work may not involve the making of important judgments. Of greater practical interest, perhaps, are the *family letters*, journals, papers and log-books that still grace a number of the older homes in this country. As Miss Una Long has shown,¹⁸ there is an absorbingly interesting field here for the social historian, and the material itself is in desperate need of proper preservation and care. Examples of such family records which have found their way to the South African Library are the diary of William Duckitt, the first English agriculturist at the Cape¹⁹; a long series of Rex Papers; the Lady Anne Barnard letters to Henry Dundas²⁰, which were presented to the Library last year; the J. X. Merriman Papers; the Rose-Innes Papers; and a number of smaller collections, which are full of material that has never been properly explored.

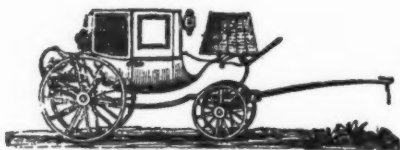
When we come to *printed material* the field is very wide; and yet, because books about South Africa were often printed for a small public in small editions, copies of some of the most interesting and important are becoming very difficult to find—except in the larger and older libraries. Moreover, even reprints of some of the classic works of travel and description published by the Van Riebeeck Society are now out of print, and have become rarities twice-removed²¹. As a sidelight and commentary on the present high and still rising prices of printed Africana it is interesting to read a letter from J. G. Gubbins (written in 1917²²) describing how he picked up a perfect coloured Harris in a 'New Thought' bookshop in London for 7/6, and four doors further on, Daniell's *Sketches* for 25/-. Those were certainly the days!

This book-material includes not only the better-known works by innumerable travellers and passers-by; books on botany, birds, game and many other aspects of African life; and works of contemporary social description. In the field of pamphlet literature there are endless by-ways of controversy—secular and religious; the subject of vernacular literature is wide and absorbing; and, despite the strictures of Carlyle there are rich deposits of information about social life and customs in the old Cape blue-books, most of which are to be found in the collections of the South African Library.

Then there is the largely-neglected field of the *newspaper and periodical press*. Anyone who has worked on these newspapers will bear witness to their value, if not to their indispensability, for the reconstruction of the life of the times. They correct the official view; they give endless sidelights, often unconscious, on the solemn histories of the day. This material, however, is rare and highly perishable, and the historical adventurer of the future will have to accustom himself to the use of the microfilm reader, for the originals are all too frequently in an advanced stage of disintegration and decay.

Lastly in this brief survey of materials come the *illustrations in books*. The collection of authoritative information about men and women who have depicted South African scenes and events, is still in progress, and there are many who await with the liveliest interest the publication of the guide to early Cape artists which is at present being compiled for publication by the firm of Charles J. Sawyer, of London²³. There is, however, one accessible source of illustrations which is not yet well enough known to members of the public: the Elliott Collection of historical negatives, which is housed in the Cape Archives in Cape Town. These negatives, numbering 13,000 in all, are the work of many years' patient research by the late Mr. Arthur Elliott, who photographed not only pictures in books, but many fine buildings that have been allowed to perish by a generation that 'cared for none of these things'. The negatives have been catalogued and copies are available at a small charge to any member of the public making application to the Archives²⁴.

So much for the chief materials: and now, for the methods of working. It must be said at once that there is no infallible routine, and that many paths lead to the same goal. But some at least of the hazards and rewards of exploration can be indicated by the two adventures that follow, both of which are attempts to re-interpret the living past in South Africa by choosing one particular line of approach—the development of books and reading in the first two centuries of European settlement at the Cape.



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II

The Age of Whispers

AT FIRST SIGHT this subject—the tracing of social history at the Cape in the first century of settlement, through books and reading, seems to be a promising one. No one has worked on it before; it has all the freshness and lure of unexplored territory. Yet it may occur to you (as it did, on reflection, to the writer), that there may be a good reason why nobody has tackled this subject before: *perhaps there is no subject to be tackled*. After all, it is common knowledge that there was no printing press at the Cape until 1784, and no free press until forty years later still. No printing press; no books and reading: here is the Age of Whispers, with a vengeance.

A second doubt arises. Here at the Cape, in the early days, were essentially practical people, wholly absorbed in gaining a foothold in hostile country—certainly few of them with sufficient leisure or learning to settle down to a book, if indeed they had such things. One is reminded of the lady who once wrote to the Editor of the American journal *Scribner's* in the following vein: 'My husband has always been a successful blacksmith. Now he is old, his mind is slowly weakening, so he has taken to writing poems, several of which are enclosed herewith'. Among people who literally have no time for books, can there be any point in pursuing this enquiry?

When, however, we begin to map out the sources, and catch echoes here and there that may lead us on to at least an impressionistic reconstruction of the times, these doubts begin to be dispelled. The picture is sketchy and incomplete, but the more gaps there are the more curious one becomes to try and fill them in.

The action begins with a ship scene: the date, September 5th, 1607; place: off the African coast. Captain William Keeling of the East India Company's ship *Dragon* bound, with the ship *Hector* (Captain William Hawkins) to the East Indies, writes in his daily log:

'I sent the interpreter, according to his desire, aboard the *Hector* where he brooke fast, and after came aboard mee where we gave the tragedie of Hamlett'.²⁵

Later on, there is an extract which some historians have cast some doubt upon, although Sir E. K. Chambers, the Shakespearean authority, sees no reason to doubt its authenticity:

'I invited Capt. Hawkins to a ffish dinner, and had Hamlet acted aboard me; which I permitt to keep my people from idlenes and unlawful games, or sleepe'.²⁶

If English seamen passed their time by acting Hamlet, Ophelia and all, what was happening aboard the Dutch Company ships that tossed uncertainly

on that long four-and-a-half months' voyage to the Cape? We have scarcely any evidence at all, but we are fortunate in having a detailed and circumstantial account of life at sea from the Texel to the Cape, by O. F. Mentzel (who retold the story of van Noodt), in his *Life of R. S. Allemann*, originally published in 1784, but relating to events at the beginning of that century. Of occupations aboard the vessel he has this to say:

'If the weather is clear, and the moon is shining, the crew make merry a little during these two hours (six o'clock till eight); some of them play various games, which generally end in blows; others pass their time with music, if their talents lie in that direction';²⁷ But no Hamlet, and, so far as we know, no books. *

AT THE CAPE ITSELF, existence was at first extremely precarious: how much so, one can guess from the entries in the official Diary, and in copies of the letters despatched home to Holland. It was touch and go whether the settlers were to stay or leave. Van Riebeeck's men were not men of leisure, but for the most part soldiers who had come to defend a post; tough fellows whose only contact with a book was with The Book—the Bible, as we can deduce from the curious episode of the Bible and the key: a supernatural occurrence in what was, after all, still the age of witchcraft.²⁸ And although the Bible remained for many years the one book known to most men, it was not necessarily read in the sense that we should read books today.

So hazy are the portents at the Cape, that we must look first Eastwards to Batavia, and then Westwards to New Netherland, to see what was going on in other Dutch outposts of the seventeenth-century world. We have already remarked that the Cape had no press: an indication, at least, that it was not looked upon as a settlement, but as a victualling station, sick-bay and fort and nothing more. In Batavia, which was of course an important settlement, the Kerkraad had set up as early as 1624 a small press, in the interests of education.²⁹ It was intended for printing small educational books and pamphlets for distribution to the natives of the islands of the Indies, just as we had here in the Cape two centuries later many mission presses, putting out vernacular material, A.B.C.'s, parts of the Bible and the like, many of which were providentially collected by Sir George Grey, and now form one of the most valuable sections of the Grey Collection at the South African Library.³⁰ Nothing remains of what was printed in Batavia earlier than about 1668, when we still have a copy of a treaty of peace with the Macassar, and in that year one Hendrik Brants, who was formerly a halbardier, was given permission

* Two later pieces of evidence about Dutch shipboard entertainments are known to us in South Africa: a series of Cape sea-shanties (*Matroozen-zang op de Reis naar Cabo de Goede Hoop*) printed in about 1803, of which an original copy is in the Gubbins Collection, Johannesburg; and a group of manuscript *Hollandsche Matroozen-liederen* now in the Kimberley Library.

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to set up as a bookseller in Batavia, and to act as the official Government Printer of the settlement. We know, too, that in Batavia there were news sheets and school books—the Fables of Aesop were well known and widely disseminated locally—and there was even an edition of poems called the *Zeedersangen* by Holland's first colonial poet, Jacob Steendam, of whom we shall have more to say in a moment.

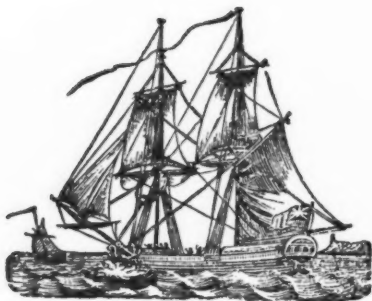
In the Dutch settlement at New Netherland—now New York—there were certainly bookish activities at this time, about which we have a fair amount of evidence.³¹ That there should have been books there at all is not surprising when you consider that in the seventeenth century there came from the free presses of Holland more than half of the books then being published in the whole of Europe. But what is more remarkable is that when the free spirit went abroad with the emigrants, freedom of expression in their newly-adopted country immediately tended to disappear, and we see in a flash the fear of the free press by the still insecure governing authorities. In New Netherland, as in the Cape, there was no press, but there were presses in other American settlements; and this was sufficient to induce the Dutch Governor to prohibit absolutely the importation of printed or unprinted books into his territory. As the inevitable result newsletters circulated clandestinely throughout the colony, and we have record of one of these, entitled *News from New England*, 1650³², which castigates the inept conduct of the Dutch Governor Stuyvesant. It is described as having been brought to New Amsterdam by some unknown person, who had stealthily thrown it into the house of an Englishman—which reminds one of the occasion here in Cape Town, two centuries later, when the *Facts* about the stopping of the *Commercial Advertiser* were ingeniously printed on a supposedly sealed press by George Greig, and flung through the window to the crowds below.

BUT AT THE CAPE of Van Riebeeck's time there was no means of throwing anything in or out of windows, except from ships that happened to be passing, and consequently we have no evidence at all of any news sheets being in circulation, whether locally compiled or not.

In New Netherlands at this time we have records of several book collections giving us a fair if imperfect indication of what the ordinary settler liked to read: mostly text-books, including school-books, many Bibles, some histories, religious works and medical handbooks which were really guides to first-aid.³³ At the Cape we have no records of this kind, with two solitary exceptions. We know that within the first ten years of settlement there were men of some education—the predikants, the sieketroosters; and later, those

picturesque figures the meesters—often discharged soldiers with a smattering of the three R's, who wandered about the countryside doing a little teaching here and there, and somehow picking up a living.

The first record that we have in these early days of books at the Cape appears in the Letters despatched to Holland in 1661, just nine years after



the foundation of the settlement.³⁴ It describes how on the 8th January of that year the Secunde, Roeloff de Man and his subordinate, J. Blank, were deputed to examine an unmarked case in the presence of the Commander, Jan van Riebeeck. This they did, and found within a number of books and other objects, including the following:

- 11 Folios, including Eusebius' *History*, Kepler's *Harmonicus Mundi*, the *Herbal* of Dodonaeus and two books on architecture;
- 11 Quartos, including a *History of the Dutch East India Company*, works on astronomy, astrology and trigonometry; an Almanac; two more books on architecture; and an Arabic Grammar.
- 2 Octavo books, including a *History of Precious Stones*.

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They also found at the bottom of the box (or perhaps, at the top):

A ream of paper wrapt in grey paper, some mussel shells, brushes, a brush holder; some gum in grey paper, 2 lead pencils, and (a first-class disappointment, this)

an empty flagon.

It is highly probable that this box was destined for the Directors at the larger settlement at Batavia, but Dr. C. Louis Leipoldt, in his life of Van Riebeeck,³⁵ would like us to think that some of these books had been specially indented for by the Commander—and this may indeed have been so: but we shall never know for sure.

Nothing more is heard of these books, but curiously enough there is another reference to Roeloff de Man and his books, this time in his last will and testament which was filed after his death at the Cape in 1663.³⁶ Among his personal possessions were a number of clothes, which are described in rewarding detail, and a number of books. But it is clear enough from their titles that none of them are the books from the unmarked case of 1661, and we must therefore assume that de Man was an honest fellow, that the box and its contents were suitably disposed of, and that the Secunde had already with him, or acquired soon after, a Bible with an embroidered cover, an early edition of the *Voyages of Jan Huygen van Linschoten*, a few law books, a little book called *The Swedish Soldier, the Batavian Arcady*, the *Wegwyser van Italien* and several similar works—a curiously mixed bag and a most interesting one.

AT THIS POINT we may well enquire what was being read outside the immediate boundaries of Cape Town at the end of the seventeenth century; and here again, we have to guess. One would imagine that some of the higher officials at the Cape would have written down their experiences on returning to Holland, and that these accounts would have found their way back to the Cape. Practically the only book of this kind that has survived is the *Lusthof* of Pieter de Neyn,³⁷ Fiscal at the Cape for two years, who published a number of poems written while he was here. But they throw little light on contemporary life, serving rather to reflect the author's own moods and manners than those of his fellows at the settlement. I have always hoped that we might discover some work of Jacob Steendam bearing on the Cape, for he must have passed this way towards the end of the seventeenth century en route for Batavia³⁸: a minor classic in his own line, author of a somewhat tedious book of poems called *Den Distelvink* (The Thistle Finch), of which we have a copy in this Library. But nothing has yet come to light to fill the gaps in this somewhat arid period of Cape literary history.

It is usually taken for granted by historians of early Cape education that the school-books of the time were almost entirely religious in character, a natural enough conviction, since education in Holland was almost entirely in the hands of the Church. Such books as have come down to us by rumour or repute are those such as the oft-reprinted *Trap der Jeugd* and the *Gesangboek* of Willem Sluyter—works that constantly reappear among the rural population during the next two centuries.

We may deduce, however, that there was among the free burghers something of a folk-tradition derived originally from Holland, and added to throughout the century by the influx of similar traditions from France and the German states. In the England of the seventeenth century, where the folk-tradition was particularly strong, the 'lower orders' were catered for by writers like Deloney, the ballad journalist, who dedicated his books to clothmakers, shoemakers and cordwainers; and one Thomas Dekker, author of a popular book called *The Bellman of London*, advertised his wares as being 'profitable for gentlemen' (note the order of precedence), 'lawyers, merchants, citizens, farmers, masters of households, and all sorts of servants, and delightful for all men to read'.³⁹

We must suppose then that there lingered on at the Cape some folk tradition, spoken if not printed, and perhaps too little attention has been paid, certainly by the English-speaking South Africans, to recent researches on this subject, notably by Dr. Abel Coetzee.⁴⁰ There still remain many legends familiar to the Afrikaner, such as those written around the Water-slang, Kokkewiet, Tokkielossie and so on, some of them influenced to a certain extent by Bantu folklore, but others deriving directly from a European tradition. We still have glimpses of folk-rhymes, such as the old jingle about the famous Van Noodt:

'Noodt is dood,
Nu is er geen Nood';

and ABC rympies persisted until the arrival of the Afrikaans literary movement when, as invariably happens, the spoken traditions tended to be lost, and forms became standardised and stereotyped.

From the Huguenots we have few literary relics: a psalm-book from the Dessinian Collection is one of the very few examples in this Library that we can definitely attribute to them. But there is no doubt that they brought books out with them, and I am told by one of their descendants that a collection of 32 books introduced in this way appear in the wills of successive generations of his family, although the books themselves have long since disappeared.⁴¹

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WHEN WE ARRIVE AT the time of Adam Tas, however, we get on to firmer ground. Just before the First World War, Mr A. C. G. Lloyd, formerly Librarian of the S.A. Library, re-discovered in the Dessinian Collection a manuscript which proved to be the only remaining copy of a diary kept day by day by the patriot, Adam Tas. The manuscript was translated and edited by the late Professor Leo Fouché, and was published by the Trustees of this Library: it has long since been out of print.⁴² This diary, with entries up to the very day that Tas was seized and taken away to the Castle in Cape Town, has several references to books. Adam Tas was himself an educated man. In the first paragraph of his diary, for instance, he refers to a messenger arriving at Stellenbosch from the Cape bringing

'the book containing the story of the brothers Cornelis and Jan de Wit, and eleven numbers of the *Boekzaal* lent a time ago to Mr. Starrenburg'.⁴³

In those days they evidently not only lent books, but got them back, too. Then further on there is a reference to a predikatie-boek by the Heer Balthazar Becker (a well-known liberal predikant) 'of blessed memory',⁴⁴ and later still, on 6 July 1705,

'To Stellenbosch this morning, and paid Mr. Mahieu 2½ rixdollars for three books bought by me at the sale of Mr. van Loon his books'.⁴⁵

Not only was the *Diary* of Adam Tas found in the Dessinian Collection, but also a number of books in this Collection are inscribed by Adam Tas and his contemporaries, chiefly at Stellenbosch, in circumstances that must now be described in more detail.

Joachim von Dessin, who founded the Dessinian Collection, was born in Mecklenberg in 1703 of what might be called a declining aristocratic family. Possibly he was tempted out to the Cape by a curious little guide-book published shortly before this time by Gerrit von Spaan: the *Gelukzoeker over de Zee, of zuid-afrikaansche Wegweyzer*, of which there is a copy in the South African Library. He arrived here in 1727 and settled at the Cape, marrying a local girl and spending his entire life here. He eventually became Secretary of the Orphan Chamber (Weeskamer), and died here in 1761. He was a man with a taste for books of many kinds—not perhaps a scholar, but something of a dabbler in many subjects; and he was also a friend of Mentzel, who describes how von Dessin pulled the leg of the credulous Abbé de la Caille by pretending that an enormous ox-bone was part of a wild rhinoceros or unicorn; a discovery that was painstakingly if mistakenly recorded by the conscientious Abbé.⁴⁶

It so happens that von Dessin left his personal effects and many household accounts at the Cape, and these have been studied in a monograph of outstanding interest and importance by Professor J. L. M. Franken (a professor of French, this time, writing history), in the *Archives Year Book* for 1940.⁴⁷ He deals in considerable detail with the collection of books amassed during

his lifetime by von Dessin—a collection which is in itself most interesting evidence of the reading preferences of the leading figures at the Cape during the eighteenth century. How this library of some five thousand books was formed has been the subject of much argument and many stories. The theory that in his capacity as Secretary of the Orphan Chamber he would travel the countryside at times of sickness and disaster, buying up the estates of the farmers, has to a certain extent been countered by Professor Franken who is able to show by internal evidence that von Dessin must have ordered a number of books direct from Holland through his friend Daniel Pells, who was head of the Latin School at Amsterdam. But in support of the older story we undoubtedly still possess a number of books in this Collection that bear the inscriptions, in their own handwriting, of many of the leading figures at the Cape.

The Collection, which was later augmented, comprises a large section on theology, a good deal of law, including some authorities to be found nowhere else in the country; a little travel, a certain amount of practical medicine, a little natural science, some interesting constitutional history and political theory in all the languages of the time—Dutch, German, Italian, English, as well as Latin and Greek; but practically nothing that we should today rank as *Africana*, with the notable exception of a set of the rare volumes on the Van der Stel controversy. Yet by a curious turn of history this Collection, which is the foundation of all the public libraries in South Africa, has in the course of time itself become a piece of *Africana*. By examining the kind of books that he chose to collect we are able to get a clear picture of the reading preferences of at least one man at the Cape, and probably of quite a number of his contemporaries.

Writing of von Dessin, Wilberforce Bird later said that he was:

'a tolerably well-educated man—collecting of books was his favourite pursuit; but he is said not to have been a man of science and literature, and it must have been by extraordinary diligence that he was enabled to bring together so many valuable publications, and to form such a library in Cape Town'.⁴⁸

It is worth while picking out a few of these publications: editions of Calvin

*Dit Werk Word door den Capitein
R. J. Gordon, van het regiment Schotten van
de Generaal Gordon ten dienste van den Staat der
Verenigde Nederlanden, aan de Publieke Bibliotheek
van de Kaap de Goede Hoop, ten jaargten 1774
gelaten. Kaap de Goede Hoop den 1sten february
1774 R. J. Gordon.*

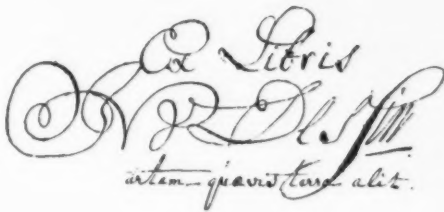
and Descartes; works by Leibniz, Le Grand, Grotius and Sir Thomas Browne; Bergius' South African Botany; La Lande on Astronomy; some finely illustrated insect books by Maria Sibylla Merian; and several quaint books on etiquette and manners. As we have seen, many of these books have inscriptions by Cape farmers and officials such as Schütte, Rhenius, Grevenbroek, Schepers and Hendrix, while many others contain the bold signature of von Dessin himself, with the Latin motto:

artem quaevis terra alit.

Two of the most interesting inscriptions are by Adam Tas and Colonel Robert Gordon. The former is to be found in a book entitled *Spiegel van Staat der Vereenigde Nederlands*, published in 1706—at that time the last word on its subject. The other is in the writing of Gordon himself, that strangely attractive figure, Scottish by descent, Dutch by upbringing, who committed suicide at the Cape when the Dutch were obliged to capitulate to the British in 1795. He must have presented these two volumes of La Lande's *Astronomy* to the 'publique biblioteek' on the occasion of his first visit to the Cape. One would give much to know more of this versatile and able observer, whose magnificently-executed maps of Cape farms are today to be found not, alas, in South Africa, but a prized possession in the Rijksprentenkabinet in Amsterdam.⁴⁰

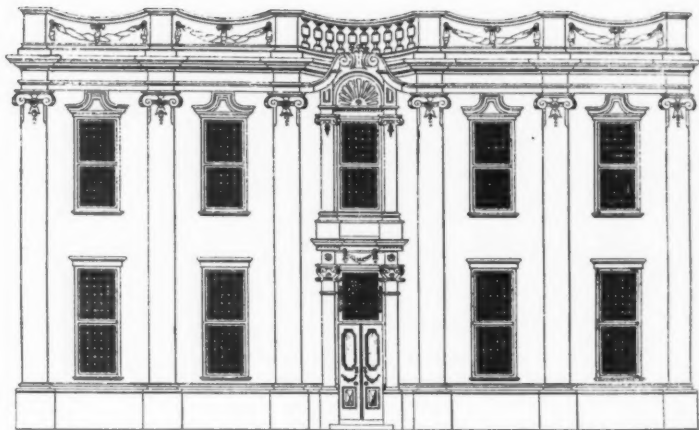
A third inscription which might be considered by the social historian as having more significance than the rest put together is to be seen in a folio work of theology by Huber; it consists of a washing-list scribbled on the end-papers in rough Dutch—a new and homely use for such a godly document!

At his death, von Dessin left his entire collection to be the nucleus of a public library for South Africa—a far-seeing benefaction well ahead of its time.⁵⁰ The Collection was in fact entrusted to the Cape Consistory, which provided accommodation in the house of the Koster (sexton) adjoining the Dutch Reformed Church, where later in the century Lady Anne Barnard discovered it. Writing to Lord Macartney in 1797 she remarks that

'The public library was next to the Church and decorated to the utmost of the white-washer's invention, being painted white, yellow and green, with a quantity of stucco or wooden Gods and Goddesses encircling the balustrade which went round the roof. As to its being of any use in the Article of Reading I doubt it, it is stacked with controversy, law and physic, mostly in *dead languages*, books which would never be enquired for if there were not some living daughters belonging to the premises, who are reckoned handsome, but whether the English have found it easy to translate *them* or not as yet I cannot tell'.⁵¹

Unkind comments from one who no doubt preferred that 'evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge', the new-fangled circulating library.



SEXTON'S HOUSE, HEERENGRACHT

Drawing by S.D.H. Schütte

Elliott Collection

WE MUST NOW RETURN for another glimpse of the country population, in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Already isolated from their fellows some of the farmers—no bookish men to begin with—had lost touch almost entirely with the outside world, and travellers to the interior were often struck by their taciturnity and a certain limitation of outlook. Even Mentzel, who in spite of his pretensions, was no man of learning, remarked that 'there are no high schools or Universities in this country. Such institutions are not required, for what use would anyone make of the learning acquired there in a land where life is still primitive and Company rule is law?'⁵² The enlightened De Mist, in his famous memorandum of 1802, was later to remark that:

'The young folk are indolent and seem to possess an intense prejudice against exerting themselves mentally, and indeed avoid doing so on every possible occasion'.⁵³

After recommending that every schoolmaster should be equipped with a 'small carefully selected library of good, intelligible and interesting school-books, free of cost',⁵⁴ and that means should be found to 'preserve and augment the Public Library' at the Cape, de Mist asserted that 'the teaching of reading, writing and the elements of arithmetic . . . will be our most powerful ally in advancing the progress of civilisation'. He also urged the immediate establishment of a Printing Establishment at Cape Town, for at that time the only press was a small one kept in the Castle, and quite inadequate for any but the simplest requirements.⁵⁴ We shall hear more of this in a moment.

It seems that the reputation for lack of learning carried back to Europe by travellers of all nationalities spread eventually to the farmers themselves, for in the amusing and instructive *Travels* of the Swede, Andreas Sparrman we come across a significant little episode that took place near the Paarl. Returning from a trip to the hinterland, Sparrman called in at a farm where he was received with customary hospitality by the farmer's wife.

'Her husband, a very brisk lively old fellow, being at last come home, immediately drank to me, saying: "Perhaps you suppose that nobody knows anything but yourself, with your herbs and you, but you shall see that we African peasants are not all so stupid as you think for." Upon this, by way of *surprising* me, he displayed a few good books and a heap of trash, on almost every science; all of which I could do no other than commend, as he did nothing but turn between me and his bookcase, and read over the whole title-page of every book, the printer's and bookseller's name not excepted. "You see", says he, "that I do not spend my whole time in following the plough"'.⁵⁵

Sparrman goes on to say that he was regaled with a sumptuous meal, but that 'by the appearance of the soup and green peas I could plainly perceive that my learned host had not studied any books of cookery, which in Africa would have been of much more use to him than poetry and the dead languages. The good woman of the house was obliged to go to bed alone, while her husband employed himself with the history of Josephus, in order to convince me of his great attachment to study'.⁵⁵

We can hardly take this learned fellow as a type; it appears that he acquired

his books (and a considerable dowry) by marriage, and he can scarcely be blamed for trying to make the most of them.

WE HAVE ALREADY NOTED that there was no printing press at the Cape for the greater part of the first 150 years of settlement. This was not for lack of asking, for we find that in their Memorial of 1779 the disaffected burghers specifically petitioned for a press and a printer, so that *placaaten* could be widely distributed, and the Government's intentions made plain.⁵⁶ Governor van der Graaff made two fruitless attempts to secure a press—the need for which must by this time have become obvious to the blindest intelligence, particularly as the Baron von Imhoff had established one in Ceylon more than 50 years earlier.⁵⁷ It is, in fact, a striking commentary on the backwardness of Company rule, and on the way in which ideas were changing at the end of the century, that de Mist needed to argue, in 1802, that

'it (a printing press) would be of universal benefit to the community, It would ensure the more rapid and efficient, and less expensive circulation of Government proclamations throughout the country districts, where the farmers are scattered hours apart from each other. It would act as a strong incentive to these farmers to learn to read these notices'. He then goes on to say that

'the misuse of the printing press could be obviated if it were placed under Government supervision. Splendid results would be bound to follow upon the publication in leaflets and in almanacs of simple and well-chosen information on various subjects . . . The establishment of a printing press would also serve as an antidote against rebellion, especially in a country where the aids to moral enlightenment and civilization are so difficult to apply'.⁵⁸

By this time, however, a small press had found its way to the Cape. In 1784 a Bavarian, J. C. Ritter, was in possession of a hand-press (whether he brought it in with him, or had it sent out we do not know), on which he 'practised printing such small trifles as my small apparatus allows'.⁵⁹ These small trifles were probably handbills and letterheads. But he did also, apparently, issue some small Almanacs 'calculated after the Meridian of this place', for we find Barrow, in his *Travels*, referring somewhat contemptuously to the one for 1797:

'that of the current year has somewhat suffered in its reputation by having stated an eclipse of the moon to fall on the day preceding the full, and to be invisible, when, unluckily for the almanac-maker, it happened at the proper time, visible, and nearly total'.⁶⁰

Lady Anne Barnard has something to say, too, about these Almanacs, for, writing to her friend Henry Dundas on June 1st, 1800, she remarks that

'This page is like a newspaper. That reminds me—the Governor (Macartney) is resolved to have one here. If it answers as the printing of an Almanac did in the Dutch time it will be droll. The printer made a fortune of two shillings by it: each of the four districts read or copied out of that one'.⁶¹



Gedruckt by, I. C. RITTER.
Aan. CAAP de. GOEDEHOOP

A fragment of an Almanack printed by J. C. Ritter
the earliest extant specimen of Cape printing

UNTIL QUITE RECENTLY we have known of only two small pieces of Cape printing before 1800 that were still extant: a small fragment of one of these Ritter Almanacs for 1796, which is a prized possession of the South African Library; and a proclamation signed by Major-General Dundas (nephew of Lady Anne's friend) dated 26th February, 1799, which is in the Cape Archives. I have sometimes suspected that a small press may have existed on one of the French ships of the fleet passing the Cape, for we know of similar imprints struck off during the American War of Independence, while cruising off the Virginian coast;⁶² but nothing of this kind has yet come to light. You can imagine our excitement therefore when early in 1946, buried in a bundle of old letters and manuscripts acquired by the Library we found an unpretentious little eight-page pamphlet, very crudely printed on paper of poor quality, with the title-page (in Dutch): '*Letter from the Missionary Society in London to the Faithful at the Cape of Good Hope, translated from the English and printed by V. A. Schoonberg for the African Society for Promoting the Extension of Christ's Kingdom. MDCCXCIX*' (1799).

We knew from stray references that one or two missionary pamphlets were in circulation at the Cape at this time, but nobody had ever seen one in modern times, and it was assumed that all the copies of such an ephemeral publication had long since perished. Here was a historical adventure of the first order; and because others may have the good fortune to make similar discoveries it may be worthwhile to set down the successive steps that we took to trace and identify our quarry.

We began with a secondary source: the excellent *History of Christian Missions*⁶³ by the late Professor du Plessis, himself an Africana collector and student of no mean order. Here we found a description of the arrival of the London Missionaries in 1799; how, when they landed at the Cape they brought with them a letter from the London Secretary, Eyre; and how this letter, on van der Kemp's initiative, was translated into Dutch and read from their pulpits by the Dutch ministers of Cape Town. As a result, subscription lists were opened and a series of meetings held, culminating in the founding of the first South African Missionary Society, with the title that is given in our Missionary Pamphlet. Du Plessis goes on to sad that 'copies of the letter of the London Missionary Society were printey and distributed to all parts of the country', but he had never seen a copy and no doubt assumed, reasonably enough, that none still existed.

We now set out on the tracks of V. A. Schoonberg, and searched those mines of information, the early Cape Almanacs; but all we could discover was that V. A. Schoonberg was a gingerbread maker and therefore unlikely to have been a printer; and that he had a son with exactly the same

names and initials as himself. Either of them might have been the printer of the pamphlet, but there was the further complication that, so far as we knew, the only press on which the pamphlet could have been printed was the one that was used by the Government in the Castle to print occasional proclamations. This led us to the Mendelssohn Library, which has an early manuscript Almanac for 1801, and here we discovered that Schoonberg junior was at one point employed as a compositor in the Government printing office, where Ritter's press had been kept. At this time however he was a mere boy.

We took up the chase in the Archives of the Dutch Reformed Church—all the Africana sources in Cape Town consulted in this search are providentially within a few minutes' walking distance of each other. Here, through the courtesy of the Archivist, Dr. Oberholster, I was able to look through the Minutes and Correspondence of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Genootschap itself, whose mission church, unknown to ninety-nine out of a hundred Capetonians, still exists at the lower end of Long Street. From these archives of the Society, incomplete though they are, it was possible to trace the course of events; to discover V. A. Schoonberg the elder acting as Second Treasurer of the new Society; and to find tantalising references to a printing press, although nothing definite enough to identify our pamphlet at this stage.

Next, at the Cape Archives, we compared the paper and typography (if anything so crude can be so designated) of the Pamphlet with the Dundas Proclamation of 1799, and found that the paper and the watermark were identical, and the type-setting equally primitive. The printer of the Missionary Pamphlet does in fact apologise in a postscript for having substituted the letter 's' for 'z' in a number of cases, because he is short of the latter—an additional indication that he is using a primitive press.

Lastly, we returned to the South African Library and set about searching carefully through the *Transactions of the London Missionary Society* for any scrap of evidence about the whole episode. We were lucky; for in a hitherto unnoticed letter to the Directors of the London Missionary Society, dated 13 May 1799, we found van der Kemp remarking that

'a Dutch translation of your letter is printed on our press, and given to the new-created Society. This is the first religious publication in Africa, of which every copy, though not containing more than five pages, will be sold at two shillings English'.

Our Pamphlet, it is true, had four leaves, or eight pages, but apart from this the publication was undoubtedly the same—the first religious publication to be printed at the Cape, the third item of Cape printing before 1800 known to be extant—and, in spite of its modest appearance, an incunabulum of the first importance.

The full story of this adventure is told in the first number of the *Quarterly*

Bulletin of the South African Library,⁶⁴ where the curious reader can follow the successive stages of reasoning which enabled us to identify the pamphlet, if not to establish the identity of the actual printer. Upon reflection, I am inclined to think that the printer was the son, and not the father, but until further evidence is discovered we shall not even know this. Meanwhile this excursion into the byways of early Cape printing has enabled us to fix several other landmarks which have changed the known order of Cape printings outside Cape Town; and who knows what further discoveries it may lead us to?



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